



**By**

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**of**

**CATHOLIC RELIEF SERVICES**

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY**

**Before**

***THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS***

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA, GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS and  
INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS**

***Christopher H. Smith, New Jersey, Chairman***

**on**

**September 28, 2006**

Good Afternoon, I wish to commend Subcommittee Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Payne, and Members of the Subcommittee for calling this hearing and offering Catholic Relief Services (CRS) the opportunity to testify on the Faith-Based and Community Initiative (FBCI). In my testimony I will:

- First, discuss our impressions of the FBCI;
- Second, describe some examples of how we work with the local Catholic Church and other faith-based partners in Africa;
- Third and most importantly, outline the challenges facing faith-based organizations like CRS as a result of the shift in U.S. foreign assistance policy toward a narrow focus on security and anti-terrorism.

Let me open by stating that the faith-based initiative is a positive development that recognizes the history of good work and vast potential of this nation's religious institutions. We believe it gives credence to the effectiveness of faith-based humanitarian organizations like CRS, Lutheran World Relief, Church World Service, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and our many other colleagues in the field who have provided decades of assistance to poor people around the world. At CRS, we believe that our grounding in our faith is an asset in our work, because it gives us an ability to project values that flow from religious convictions that other non-faith-based organizations have difficulty articulating.

A great part of CRS' operational advantage is our ability to engage an extensive network of local faith-based organizations, including local Catholic dioceses and parishes, as well as social service agencies, through which we carry out our work. We have seen that as a result of the FBCI, some of our local partners have greater access to funding, have increased dialogue with donors, and have formed other partnerships.

However, progress in this regard is threatened by broader changes in the U.S. Government approach to foreign assistance. We fear that it will be difficult to preserve a role for faith-based and community organizations in this changing context that appears to place a greater value on contracting and short-term deliverables over long-term, sustainable development.

## **1. THE IMPACT OF THE FAITH-BASED INITIATIVE**

We understand that the primary focus of the FBCI was to increase access to federal funding for faith-based groups that had not previously had access, and that its focus has been more domestic than international. Therefore, it is not surprising that there has been little or no growth in the CRS public resources portfolio that can be directly attributed to the FBCI. Grants are not offered to CRS because we are a faith-based organization. However, CRS has seen some

expansion of opportunities and increased receptiveness of governmental actors, not only for CRS, but for other faith-based organizations as well.

CRS has been using U.S. taxpayer-provided resources in relief and development programs for more than 60 years. We work with a wide range of U.S. Government departments and agencies, including the Department of State, USAID (including Food for Peace and OFDA), USDA, the Department of Labor, the Department of Health and Human Services and others.

We do not seek preferential treatment because we are a faith-based organization. We only want a level playing field. The merits of our programs and our stewardship of resources are sufficient to make us competitive. Our faith-based network of partners makes us a superior choice as a cooperating sponsor or grantee.

Despite the fact that larger, established faith-based organizations were not a primary target of this initiative, we have felt welcomed at high levels within the Administration, and we believe our input has been valued. For example, we have been able to present our perspectives on the importance of poverty alleviation in the context of the Millennium Challenge Account, where I serve on the Board of Directors. We have been able to meet and discuss issues with the Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives as well as with officials in the faith-based initiative offices in various U.S. Government departments and agencies.

We have seen greater sensitivity from the U.S. Government to the approaches of the faith-based community. Organizations such as CRS and others attempted to improve the terms under which we work for many years. Some changes were made grudgingly before the FBCI – such as lifting the informal ban on funding non-condom distributing organizations. We are happy to report that the US Government is open to a wide variety of effective and proven approaches to women’s reproductive health and HIV and AIDS that center on combinations of nutrition, hygiene, health care, education and moral behavior.

## **2. FAITH-BASED PARTNERSHIPS IN AFRICA**

For decades, CRS has sought to build the capacity of local organizations, faith-based and otherwise, to assist them in identifying and addressing their own needs. The work of CRS is grounded in Catholic Social Teaching, which stresses the dignity of the human person and the profound ties that unite all humanity. It also promotes the concept of subsidiarity, which holds that decision-making should not be centralized, but should flow down to the appropriate local level.

At the same time, CRS does represent fundamental American values. Americans expect the active involvement to the fullest extent of all recipients of our aid. This means that people are participants, not just beneficiaries or bystanders, in

development and relief programs. It means that we must partner as equals with all the dignity afforded a true partner.

Let me briefly highlight how we work with the Catholic Church and other faith-based partners in Africa.

- The work of faith-based organizations like CRS goes far beyond implementing so many specific 2- or 3-year projects. On a visit this past April to Juba in southern Sudan, Vice President Salva Kiir told me how important it was to the people of south Sudan that CRS stayed with them to help them gain a right to self determination. We have been in Sudan and we will stay as long as we are needed.
- CRS has supported the Catholic Bishops of the Democratic Republic of Congo in educating voters as to their voting rights and the need for them to participate in the ongoing electoral process in that high-potential but war-torn country.
- In Benin, with support from a U.S. Department of Labor grant, we are working with the Church to address the problem of child trafficking. The trafficking project we have there has provided community outreach and support for vocational training for 10,000 trafficked and at-risk children and their families.
- Finally with the support of CRS private funds and the President's AIDS initiative (PEPFAR) we are working through a variety of networks in Africa, including the faith-based networks, to provide (as of August 31, 2006) a total of 47,323 people living with HIV with life-preserving anti-retroviral drugs and another 100,401 people living with HIV with related medical care.

These examples underscore that one key to CRS success in promoting development and relief is forming partnerships with local organizations. These links provide continuity for development programs and promote greater effectiveness in aid implementation.

### **3. THE CHALLENGE TO FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS**

I fear that the positive potential for the FBCI to influence both the actors in foreign assistance and the programs being carried out may be overshadowed by recent changes in foreign assistance. I see a shift in U.S. foreign policy and overseas aid toward a narrow focus on security and anti-terrorism that could undermine the tenets of partnership and sustainable development.

The current State Department model stresses the 3-Ds: Diplomacy, Defense and Development. In principle, it is a solid model whose merits can and must be

debated. In practice, what troubles me most at the outset is the lack of attention to our traditional core constituency: the poorest of the poor. The Foreign Assistance Framework, in its July 11 version at least, makes no mention at all of poverty or hunger. Instead, the overarching emphasis underpinning Transformational Diplomacy, the State Department's new philosophical foundation for foreign assistance, seems to be counter-terrorism. We have heard from our representative in Ethiopia that "the number one priority for all U.S. Government programming in Ethiopia is counter-terrorism." Therefore, all USAID programs need to be justified in terms of working towards this goal. Where does such an approach leave the most destitute served by groups like the Missionaries of Charity? Where is the attention to alleviating poverty and addressing the root causes of hunger, which one could argue are significant contributing factors to instability and the conditions that foster conflict and terrorism?

This emphasis leaves CRS to wonder how we, as a faith-based organization, can find an appropriate place for ourselves and our partners in future foreign assistance efforts. We simply cannot sign onto an initiative that subsumes our mission as an agency serving extremely poor people in the developing world into a security paradigm.

The U.S. Government's increasing preference for providing assistance through contracts focuses on the short-term results without supporting a long-term process of building up local organizations. These contracts or awards are often based on physical infrastructure built – such as wells dug, schools built or clinics supplied. What this approach does not measure is the impact on disease prevention, opportunities for girls in education, or indices of health promotion. For instance, a school feeding program does nothing to improve education if it is not linked to teacher training and compensation, water and sanitation at the school, curriculum improvement, parent-teacher associations and child de-worming. We see programs increasingly split into discreet contracts or having such a narrow focus and timeframe that will ultimately result in no sustainable change in people's lives. Unless U.S. government-supported programming takes a wider focus, a longer time frame and more people-centered approach, it will not be sustainable.

Moreover, we are increasingly forced to treat partners as if they are subcontractors. This goes against our nature. There are growing numbers of solicitations requiring U.S. Government approval of sub-recipients and "fair and open competition" for sub-recipient participation in receiving resources from the prime awardee. This requirement effectively undermines our long-term commitment to our community-based partners of all faiths, and potentially requires us to make our traditional Church partners compete against other faith communities.

To conclude, from CRS' perspective, the greatest impact of the FBCI has been increased sensitivities in U.S. Government agencies toward the issues and values espoused by faith-based organizations. In the broader context, CRS believes that the most important foreign aid issues are maintaining a focus on long-term development and ensuring that poverty reduction isn't sacrificed in the increasing emphasis on national security.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would be glad to respond to any questions.